

MINUTES

**Second Quarterly Meeting of the
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION
Held, pursuant to notice
Tuesday, April 20, 2004 — 10:00 AM
1719 Southridge Drive, Jefferson City, MO**

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance

Robert Blum, MVC Employee of the Fourth Quarter 2003 and Employee of the Year Award.

B. Roll Call

In attendance: **Chairman Emmett Fairfax, Vice Chairman Carson Ross, Member Donald Gralike, Member Bernadette Miller and Member Carl Niewoehner**

C. Introductions

Guests and staff present.

1. Guests: **Jim Whitfield**, Western Area Coordinator, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Gary Campbell**, Director Columbia VA Hospital.; **Chief Raphael Wahwassuck**, Commander DAV, Dept. of MO; **Ernie Lee**, Chairman MAVO; **Lynn Dorrell**, Adjutant American Legion; **Richard Heigert**, American Legion; **Nancy Arnold**, Director Poplar Bluff VA Hospital; **Ralph Skelly**, MOPH;

2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Tim Norton**, Director of Properties; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Jerry Quigley**, Director Jacksonville Cemetery; **Ken Swarengin**, Director Bloomfield Cemetery; **Mike Robbins**, Director Springfield Cemetery;

D. Approval of January 14, 2004 Commission Meeting Minutes. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as recorded. Commissioner Ross made a motion to accept the minutes and Commissioner Gralike seconded the motion.

II. OLD BUSINESS:

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

- 1) Appeals Hearing with the Department of Veterans Affairs was held on March 22, 2004 in St. Louis regarding the Warrensburg per diem issue. In 2001 the Commission was denied payment of \$906,000 from VA based on failure to install proper vision panel doors. Andrea Spillars, Attorney General's office represented the Commission. The Commission does not expect to hear a decision at least not before 3 months. MVC should have a report at next Commission meeting.
- 2) HB600 – passed last year requires as a condition of state government employment that all state income taxes due be filed and paid by the employee. approximately 45 days ago these employees were notified and given 45 days to get into compliance or would require dismissal. MVC has under 20 employees not in compliance to date and may require dismissal.
- 3) Last summer last year VA proposed to increase the per diem rate in FY2004 to \$59.46, however Congress passed the budget and signed 4 weeks ago the per diem rate at \$57.76. This will cost MVC approximately \$400,000 per year and lowers the base for any future increases. This is the reason MVC has revised its projections.

Ron Taylor and Hal Dulle were in Washington attending the NASDVA Conference in March and met with Senator Bond. They expressed their concerns of continued operation costs of the veterans homes and the VA.

- 4) Korean Medal – The National Guard has started the mailing process of the medals and certificates to those indicating on the application form they would like to receive by mail. For those veterans wanting ceremonies the first ceremony will be planned for May.
- 5) Budget - In the House 93 additional FTE was approved for the Homes program (as Governor recommended – less than 196 MVC requested). The House proposed a 2% increase and a 75 cent shift differential was included.

In the House \$1 million was put in MVC budget for Veteran Education Video Taping. Floor debate decision put an additional \$1 million into Home Fund. This funding would be transferred from Early Childhood Development in the budget bill. Some concerns on whether this is constitutional or not.

The House added \$239,000 increase for RN induction rate in St. Louis since the pharmacy contract renewal came in less than originally estimated that increase was reduced in the House.

The Senate took out \$30,000 of \$105,000 for increase in STV program.

A \$250,000 core cut to Homes Program was made in the Senate. They also cut shift differential for CNA's from 75 cents to 30 cents and cut the induction rate increase for RN's in St. Louis.

The Senate recommended a \$1,200 increase to all state employees per year. The Senate also included an increase in state contribution in healthcare.

Commissioner Niewoehner inquired about Congress and the current per diem budget issue. Ron indicated that a current bill HR4020 proposed in Congress may help, the bill provides VA to be allowed to pay states a matching grant to develop an education program for retention of employees. The matching grant would offer an employee incentive scholarship program or other employee incentive program at a State home designed to promote the hiring and retention of nursing staff and to reduce nursing shortages at the home. Hal Dulle stated that Congressman Skelton has signed onto HR4020 bill and is interested in the Commissions input

Commissioner Niewoehner distributed to the members a DAV article stating that President's Proposed Budget Shortchanges Veterans.

Mr. Taylor reported prior to Jefferson City Supermarket Commissioner Ross spoke to KC Star regarding veterans benefits. Alison Young visited the Supermarket held on April 8th. Ms. Young and Mike McGraw will be doing articles around Memorial Day on Veterans Homes and benefits.

Mr. Taylor reported to the Commission that repeated attempts have been made to reach the Attorney General's office regarding the investigation progress on Swan Lake. He will continue to contact them to get status.

Hal Dulle informed the Commissioners regarding other proposed legislation. HB 1381 Veterans' Outreach and Education Programs, and HB 1382 creates the funding called the Veterans Historical Trust Fund which will be administered by MVC. HB 1648 has no direct impact to MVC however it will authorize an individual income tax deduction for any amount of military retirement benefits received by a taxpayer that has not already been deducted or excluded. This bill also removes the current limited deduction for military retirement benefits in lieu of the full deduction. Mr. Dulle asked the Commission to recognize Ernie Lee, President MAVO and the American Legion, DAV and VFW.

Mr. Dulle reported that the Gold Star License Plate bill has not been scheduled a hearing at this time.

Senator Kennedy has offered legislation that would create a one dollar check-off on the Missouri income tax return. The money designated by the check-off will be deposited into the Missouri Military Family Relief Fund, to be

administered by the adjutant general and distributed to the families of Missouri residents who are members of the National Guard or the reserves and have been called to duty as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Colonel Wayne Medley spoke briefly on current National Guard activation issues. The Guard currently has 3,400 soldiers activated.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

Homes Program – Census/Waiting List/Donations/Volunteer Hours Statistics Report effective March 31, 2004 was distributed to the Commissioners.

Ms. Payne reported that a new centralized waiting list is being developed. This list will allow the Homes Program to sort more efficiently veteran application data.

Warrensburg Veterans Home has appointed Bill Willet as the new Administrator replacing Stan Smith who will now be in Central Office assisting with the day to day functions with the Homes Administrators.

Mt. Vernon Veterans Home Dedication Ceremony was a beautiful event and they are anxious to get the residents moved into the new facility. She reported MVC is waiting on the VA to complete the final recognition inspection.

There are growing concerns with the St. Louis Veterans Home facility. A report was prepared for the Commissioners which outlines the operational issues we are faced with today.

The St. Louis Veterans Home will hold its Grand Opening Ceremony for the new 100 bed dementia unit on May 20th. Governor Bob Holden will be guest speaker at the ceremony. Fifty veterans are currently being served in the new expansion and of these forty were transfers. They are monitoring nursing shortages as indicated in the report. Ms. Payne reported there are currently no LPN vacancies.

Commissioner Niewoehner and Commissioner Gralike expressed their concerns regarding the St. Louis Home staff retention issues and waiting list issues.

Mr. Taylor reported till January 2005 the St. Louis Home will be a 250 bed facility to allow for the completion of renovation project.

Construction Update: Tim Norton, Director of Properties

Construction – (Hand out) Tim Norton reported that the Fort Leonard Wood Veterans Cemetery is currently completing site survey, legal description and additional soil borings. These should be completed within the next two weeks.

Two additional surveys will be required to be done by Fort Leonard Wood prior to transfer of property. The Unexploded Ordinance Survey and the Environmental Baseline Survey once those surveys have been completed final legal description should be approximately 210 acres transferred.

Mt. Vernon – MVC is currently working with Office of Design and Construction to insure that the contractor completes several outstanding punch list items. VA has been contacted and we have requested the recognition inspection. As soon as VA completes their inspection we will begin moving residents into the new facility.

St. Louis dementia wing – Phase two, (installation of new nurse call, energy mgt. System, sprinkler piping) is currently being completed in the original facility.

Warrensburg and Cameron – Chiller project is currently under construction.

St. James – Dementia dining/activity should be out for bid process this fall and will take approximately 10 months to complete.

Cape Girardeau – HAVC project consist of upgrading the heating, air conditioning and ventilating system, replacing flooring, renovating and expanding the kitchen, adding a solarium, dementia dining/activity room and painting resident room walls.

St. Louis- roof replacement included replacing the existing roof which has been on since the opening in November 1993 and has extensive hail damage with a new 40 year architectural shingle roof, adding a security fence around the back of the facility and replacing exterior doors.

Springfield Cemetery – This projects consist of building a new 900 nich columbarium wall. VA has indicated the project may not be funded in this fiscal year, although we have state funding to complete the project and are proceeding with the design of the project. We have completed a pre-application to VA and will be having them review our progress to insure federal funds in the future. We have done this in the past with the HAVC project at the Mexico Veterans Home. That project was completed and two years later we received a check for 65% of the cost, which was deposited into the VCCITF. This project would be 100% reimbursed by VA.

St. Louis – a design for a new entrance has been completed. The design includes a merge and deceleration lane. It was anticipated that funds from the current project would be available to construct, but due to the number of contract changes these funds were needed for other upgrades. MVC is considering using maintenance and repair funds, which will be available July 1, 2004.

Mr. Norton reported that VA has instructed to be careful with estimates. There has been a significant increase in building materials. He noted the cost of steel has increased 70% in the past 6 months and copper has increased 40% in the last 3 months.

Some of the cost involved with the current projects
Warrensburg & Cameron - \$850,000 each chiller upgrades
St. James - \$350,000 dementia dining/activity room
Cape Girardeau - 7 million dollars HVAC and misc. upgrades project
Springfield - \$810,000 columbarium wall
St. Louis - \$350,000 entrance

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Service to Veterans – Sharon Keith reported the Service to Veterans Program, Service officers have been very busy. MVC is tracking and reporting activity through out the state. Increase in client activity indicates that Ft. Leonard Wood ranks top, Cape Girardeau, Springfield and Joplin. Reports indicate lower activity in Northeast Region then Northwest and Kansas City (due to only part time officer). There are a total number of 38 Service Officers working in the state.

Interviews will be conducted next week for the Supervisor position in the Southeast Region. This position was vacated by Stan Baughn who has accepted the position of Director of Planning.

Cemeteries Update: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

Cemetery Program – (Hand out) Jess Rasmussen reported a combined total of 2,085 burials have been performed at the four cemeteries and 8,637 pre-registrations completed.

Mr. Rasmussen reported that the Cemetery Program is continuing its outreach efforts. He will continue to work with Carson Ross in reaching veterans in the Kansas City area. He indicated that they are anticipating Ft. Leonard Wood Cemetery will help to fill the gap. The Cemetery Program has also participated in the Veterans Benefits Supermarkets across the state.

A list of number of burials and pre-certifications by county was distributed to the Commissioners.

Doors for the committal shelter at Higginsville cemetery should be in this week.

VSO Grants: Ronald Taylor, Executive Director

VSO Grant Program- Ron Taylor reported that MVC should be receiving application forms over the next month for the next fiscal year. All money was distributed for this fiscal year.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Ralph Durnbaugh, Director

VBATF – Ralph Durnbaugh introduced to the Commissioners the Mayoral Advisory Committee on Veterans Issues. Those in attendance included Mayor Charles Ealy, Bolivar, Mayor Bob Wasson, Sedalia, Mayor J.P. Evans, West Plains, Mayor Richard Russell, Joplin and Bob Russell, Director Economic Development from the City of Florissant representing Mayor Robert Lowery, Florissant. These Mayors will be creating a model for other Mayors to use in promoting Veterans Benefits Awareness in their outreach efforts.

Mr. Durnbaugh introduced Stan Baughn to the Commissioners. Mr. Baughn is Mr. Durnbaugh's replacement.

Mr. Durnbaugh updated the Commission on the Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force. Charts were distributed showing the monthly summary of MVC calls to the toll free number. Over 5, 500 calls have been made to the hotline to date.

Benefits Supermarkets – the 18th Supermarket was held in Jefferson City on April 8 in conjunction with the Support the Troops Rally held at the Capitol building and the Missouri House of Representatives Veterans Recognition Day on the house floor. The Supermarket was a huge success and Mr. Durnbaugh advised the Commissioners that Central Office helped make that happen by volunteering their time all day. Over 60 agencies and organizations were represented and provided information and service to more than 250 veterans. The 18 Supermarkets have served over 4,100 veterans to date. Mr. Durnbaugh expressed his appreciation to the Commissioners for their continual support in the Veterans Benefits Awareness Program.

Mr. Durnbaugh was presented a plaque from the Commission for his dedication and service to the Commission and the Veterans of the state of Missouri. Mr. Durnbaugh retires effective May 1, 2004.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

Ron Taylor advised that the VA has finalized the new Regulations for the Cemetery Grant Program. The Federal Cemeteries Grant Program is allowing non-residents of states to be buried in State Cemeteries. Currently Kentucky and Tennessee have an agreement to allow residents from each others state to be buried in their state Veterans Cemeteries. Missouri will look at this over the next

3 to 6 month but Mr. Taylor expressed concerns with this in the Homes Program with non-residents.

Commissioner Niewoehner expressed his concerns with the VCCITF.

Ernie Lee, President MAVO presented to the Commission a proclamation from the Governor, proclaiming January 14, 2004 as Veterans Appreciation Day. Senator Yeckel had the proclamation framed.

Gary Campbell, Director VA Hospital Columbia distributed to the Commissioners the 2003 Annual Report from Harry S. Truman Veterans Hospital. He also distributed a VA medical care fact sheet and spoke briefly regarding health care in the VA. He noted that the VA noticed about one year ago a large increase in veterans getting signed into the VA system and feels this was due to MVC outreach efforts. Mr. Campbell expressed his concerns with healthcare professional's salary competition.

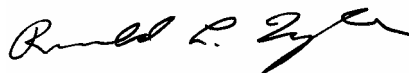
Nancy Arnold, Director VA Hospital Poplar Bluff reported that due to the four Community Clinics especially in the one Cape Girardeau the VA has more than doubled the veterans being served, and they have added another practitioner in the Cape clinic. In addition the VA has developed a Telehealth Care program that allows veterans to televideo their office visits and the video is then sent in to the VA hospitals which saves the veterans having to drive for hospitals visits.

Commissioner Ross informed the Commission that he serves on the not for profit Hospital Board. He indicated that private medical operations or organizations are experiencing similar issues that we are in the healthcare field.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Fairfax announced the next Commission meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 3 from 10:00- 12:00 at Missouri Veterans Home Mt. Vernon.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.



Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary